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COORDINATION QUESTIONS: PROPOSED SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, 1996-2001

Letter dated 22 April 1996 from the Chairperson of the Commission on the Status of Women to the Chairperson of the Committee for Programme and Coordination

I have the honour to refer to item 5, entitled "Coordination questions" of the provisional agenda of the Committee for Programme and Coordination at its thirty-sixth session. Under this item, the Committee is expected to consider the revised proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 (E/1996/16).

The Commission on the Status of Women, at its fortieth session, had before it a draft of the plan (E/CN.6/1996/CRP.2). After consideration of the draft, the Commission adopted resolution 40/10, entitled "Comments on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001".

Resolution 40/10 of the Commission on the Status of Women is herewith submitted to the Committee for Programme and Coordination for its information (see annex).

(Signed) Sharon Brennen HAYLOCK

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ANNEX

Commission on the Status of Women

Resolution 40/10. Comments on the proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001*

The Commission on the Status of Women,

Recalling Economic and Social Council resolution 1985/46, in which the Council requested the formulation of a system-wide medium-term plan for women and development, and the resulting plan, 1/ as endorsed by the Council in its resolution 1987/86,

Also recalling Council resolution 1988/59, in which the Council requested the Secretary-General to initiate the formulation of a system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women for the period 1996-2001,

Noting that the Commission had before it at its thirty-seventh session a draft system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, 2/ and that in its resolution 1993/16, the Council adopted the proposal of the Commission on the Status of Women to invite the Secretary-General to revise the draft plan after the Beijing Platform for Action 3/ and the second review and appraisal of the Nairobi Forward-looking Strategies for the Advancement of Women 4/ had been formulated and adopted by the Fourth World Conference on Women,

Recognizing the role of the Council in overseeing system-wide coordination in the implementation of the Platform for Action,

Recalling that Governments have the primary responsibility for implementing the Platform for Action,

Further recalling that the Platform for Action needs to be implemented through the work of all of the organizations and bodies of the United Nations system as an integral part of system-wide programming,

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* Advance unedited version.

1/ E/1987/52.

2/ E/1992/43.

3/ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20), chap. I, resolution 1, annex II.

4/ Report of the World Conference to Review and Appraise the Achievements of the United Nations Decade for Women: Equality, Development and Peace, Nairobi, 15-26 July 1985 (United Nations publication, Sales No. E.85.IV.10), chap. I, sect. A.

Recognizing that the Platform for Action calls upon the specialized agencies and other organizations of the United Nations system to strengthen their support for actions at the national level and to enhance their contributions to coordinated follow-up by the United Nations, each organization should set out the specific actions that they will undertake, including goals and targets to realign priorities and redirect resources to meet the global priorities identified in the Platform for Action, with a clear delineation of responsibility and accountability, all of which should be reflected in the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001, and stressing in this connection the need for appropriate mechanisms for coordination and cooperation,

Aware that the Platform for Action stresses that the responsibility for ensuring its implementation and the integration of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations system must rest at the highest levels,

Also aware that the Platform for Action recommends that the Council consider dedicating at least one coordination segment before the year 2000 to coordination of the advancement of women, based on the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women,

Further aware that the Platform for Action recommends that the Council consider dedicating at least one operational activities segment before the year 2000 to the consideration of development activities related to gender, based on the revised system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, with a view to instituting guidelines and procedures for implementation of the Platform for Action by the funds and programmes of the United Nations system,

Mindful that the Platform for Action requests the Secretary-General to assume responsibility for the coordination of policy within the United Nations for the implementation of the Platform for Action and for mainstreaming a system-wide gender perspective in all activities of the United Nations, and noting the appointment of a senior adviser on gender,

1. Stresses that the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 should be an effective instrument for promoting the coordinated implementation of the Beijing Platform for Action;

2. Takes note of the revised draft plan prepared by the Ad Hoc Inter-agency Meeting on Women; 5/

3. Recommends the adoption of the revised draft plan by the Economic and Social Council, taking into account the present resolution and the comments of the Commission contained in the annex to the present resolution;

4. Emphasizes the importance of a coherent approach and of the strategic orientation/focus of the United Nations system spelled out under each critical area of concern;

5/ E/CN.6/1996/CRP.2.

5. Stresses the importance of gender mainstreaming including institutional follow-up and capacity-building;

6. Recommends that the system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 serve as a monitoring and coordination tool at all levels for system-wide progress in implementing actions under each critical area of concern in the Platform for Action;

7. Stresses the importance of involving all parts of the United Nations in the implementation of the Platform for Action, including the decision-making level;

8. Invites the United Nations bodies that meet under the auspices of the Administrative Committee on Coordination to regularly discuss progress made in implementing activities under each area of critical concern, taking into account the long-term programme of work of the Commission on the Status of Women and the Economic and Social Council, and to provide up-to-date information in those areas to the Council through the Commission, taking into consideration the comments made on the plan by the Commission and other relevant bodies;

9. Recommends that the Council, through the Commission, follow up the implementation of the plan and undertake a comprehensive mid-term review of the implementation of the plan as a basis for future programming and coordination of activities for the advancement and empowerment of women by the United Nations system, including a review of progress in mainstreaming a gender perspective in all activities of the United Nations system;

10. Invites the Secretary-General to submit to the Council for its consideration of the draft plan the comments of the Committee for Programme and Coordination and the Administrative Committee on Coordination, along with the comments of the Commission;

11. Recommends that the Administrative Committee on Coordination and the proposed Inter-Agency Committee on the follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women use the plan and comments on it as a basis for monitoring increasing collaboration and cost-effective approaches to United Nations system activities for the advancement and empowerment of women, including the assessment of methods for mainstreaming a gender perspective in all United Nations activities, ensuring accountability and carrying out impact analyses of gender-sensitive programmes and policies;

12. Recommends that the Council request the Secretary-General to submit to it, through the Commission at its forty-second session, a progress report on the implementation of the plan;

13. Requests the Secretary-General to ensure the mainstreaming of a system-wide gender perspective in all United Nations activities, including in decision-making as part of the accountability of senior managers;

14. Urges the Secretary-General to implement the decision taken by the fiftieth session of the General Assembly to strengthen the capacity of the Division on the Advancement of Women and emphasizes the need to provide the

necessary resources in the current revision of the programme budget for the biennium for the comprehensive follow-up of the Platform for Action. "The reformulation of policies and reallocation of resources may be needed within and among programmes, without prejudice to development programmes, but some policy changes may not necessarily have financial implications. Mobilization of additional resources, both public and private, including resources from innovative sources of funding, may also be necessary";

15. Requests the Secretary-General on the implementation of the Platform for Action to integrate a gender perspective on budgetary decisions on policies and programmes as well as adequate financing of specific programmes for securing equality between women and men;

16. Recommends that the Council request the formulation of a new system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women to cover the period 2002-2005, and that the Secretary-General, in his capacity as Chairman of the Administrative Committee on Coordination, submit the new draft plan to the Council at its substantive session of 2000 in order to provide guidance to the medium-term plans of the individual organizations of the United Nations system, and that the draft of the proposal be submitted to the Commission on the Status of Women at its forty-fourth session for comments.

Annex

COMMENTS OF THE COMMISSION ON THE STATUS OF WOMEN ON THE PROPOSED SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM PLAN FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN, 1996-2001 6/

I. GENERAL COMMENTS

1. The system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 needs to be more than a compilation of what the organizations of the United Nations system are doing.

2. More emphasis should be given to coordination and collaboration between different organizations and actors.

3. The concept of visible mainstreaming should be better reflected in the indicative planning of the system.

4. In many cases, multiple actors are identified under actions to be taken, while the list of actors under different critical areas of concern should not be exclusive; the possibility of identifying leading agencies should be explored.

5. More emphasis is needed on "policy coordination and the implementation of policies and guidance", as by establishing a real bridge between research and analysis, function and operational activities.

6/ The proposed system-wide medium-term plan for the advancement of women, 1996-2001 was before the Commission in document E/CN.6/1996/CRP.2.

6. The United Nations Secretariat as a whole should undertake activities in the critical areas of concern - not only those entities that have a specific mandate on the advancement of women and the operational agencies. Certain entities of the Secretariat, such as the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, the Department of Political Affairs, the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development, the Office of Legal Affairs and the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, are not included in these activities. As another example, the Joint and Co-sponsored United Nations Programme on Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immunodeficiency Syndrome needs to be better reflected in the system-wide medium-term plan.

7. A more strategic orientation on the mainstreaming of a gender perspective within the work of the United Nations is needed.

8. The system-wide medium-term plan should have more focus on outputs and results to be achieved.

II. SPECIFIC COMMENTS

A. Women and poverty

1. More emphasis should be placed on the need for joint efforts by the United Nations system as regards the use of gender-disaggregated data and the development of indicators to monitor trends in poverty from a gender perspective.

2. Insufficient attention is given to an understanding of the underlying causes of poverty. The system-wide medium-term plan should reinforce the principle that resources allocated to development policies and programmes aimed at the eradication of poverty should not be diverted to emergency relief assistance.

3. The notion that women's empowerment and the promotion and protection of their human rights are fundamental for the achievement of development, should also be better reflected in the plans.

4. The integration of a gender dimension in the design and implementation of both macroeconomic and micro-economic policies, including structural adjustment programmes, is crucial. The system-wide medium-term plan highlights this as regards both research/analysis and operational activities. It is surprising, however, that no reference is made to the role of the World Bank in paragraph 29 or to United Nations funds and programmes (the United Nations Development Programme, the United Nations Children's Fund and the United Nations Population Fund).

5. There is the need for all United Nations bodies to be involved in development cooperation activities to mainstream a gender perspective into all their policies and programmes. This would imply the integration of gender analysis and the development of gender expertise both at Headquarters and in the field.

B. Education and training of women

6. Action within the United Nations Secretariat should include analysis and monitoring of data, policy development and coordination of action by various parts of the United Nations. Currently action is limited almost exclusively to United Nations agencies. There are limited references to the Division for the Advancement of Women of the Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and the Department of Public Information.

7. The United Nations system should consider how to integrate life-long education and training throughout the activities of the system and promote similar action at the national level. Appropriate support mechanisms for teaching in difficult, especially violent, situations should be established.

8. Data collection and research should include wider activities of the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis.

9. Data collection should focus on data not currently available. Existing data may need to be presented in a different format to be useful to relevant committees but duplication of data collection should be avoided.

10. Measures that encourage the participation of girls and women in science and technology in primary, secondary and further education should be included.

C. Women and health

11. All the items in this section should be updated to reflect accurately the language from the International Conference on Population and Development Programme for Action and the Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action. 7/

12. All relevant parts of the Platform for Action need to be implemented at all levels.

13. All relevant actors throughout the United Nations, including the Department for Economic and Social Information and Policy Analysis, the United Nations Population Fund and the Centre for Human Rights need to be involved in this implementation.

14. The gender aspects of AIDS should be better integrated into United Nations activities. The heavy burden of care that is often placed on caregivers, in particular women, needs to be addressed.

15. The general comments need to avoid duplication of activity. It should be recognized, however, that more than one actor will have an interest in each area.

7/ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20).

16. The involvement of men needs to be further addressed, as does the encouragement of men and women to take responsibility for their sexual and reproductive behaviour.

17. The need to integrate education on reproductive and sexual health, including family planning, into all population and development programmes should be addressed.

18. This is insufficient consideration to the issue and to the activities proposed to deal with the graver problems of health of women and girls. A high priority should be given to eliminating the major causes of death in women and girls.

19. References to equality in utilization of health care should be understood to mean provision in response to need, as often women are the larger users of health-care services, while reaffirming that there should be equality of access to health care.

D. Violence against women

20. Actions contained in the system-wide medium-term plan in relation to strategic objective D.3 (Eliminate trafficking in women and assist victims of violence due to prostitution and trafficking) of the Platform for Action are very limited, as is the list of organizations involved.

E. Women and armed conflict

21. The focus under this critical area of concern should be on actions to be taken by the United Nations system consistent with the United Nations Charter in order to protect women who are victims or who are at risk of becoming victims, of armed conflict from violence and abuse.

22. Measures to raise awareness of women's rights in armed conflict, inter alia on the training of police, military personnel, health workers, teachers, managers of camps for refugee/displaced persons should be further elaborated.

23. Measures to promote the more active participation of women in conflict resolution need to be addressed as the equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for prevention and resolution of conflicts are essential for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security. However, the system-wide medium-term plan should not assume - as the text now does - that there are major difference between women's and men's attitudes to peace, security and conflict resolution.

F. Women and the economy

24. In relation to the care of children and dependants and the sharing of family responsibilities, child care and dependant care need to be provided as integral parts of the concept of gender equality and gender analysis, and ILO Convention No. 156 needs to be promoted.

25. In operational activities, there should be a greater commitment to the provision of care of children and dependants.

26. The work on indicators should be better coordinated. The World Bank should also be associated with the analysis of data on globalization and change in international work patterns.

27. Under operational activities, there should be a clearer reference to United Nations system assistance to Governments in implementing policies to ensure women equal rights with men to economic resources; this should include access to ownership and control over land and other forms of property, credit, inheritance, natural resources and new technologies.

28. As regards work and employment, there should be a more comprehensive approach to methods of measuring and disseminating information on types, extent and distribution of unremunerated work in keeping with the relevant paragraphs of the Platform, particularly paragraph 165 (g).

29. As regards women in the rural sector, as reflected in paragraphs 137 and 138 of the system-wide medium-term plan, there should be more emphasis on the concepts contained in the Platform for Action, in particular paragraph 166 (c) thereof.

30. Utilize fully the collective capacity of the United Nations system to promote gender analysis and policy advice on the impact of global economic issues on women, particularly the effects of economic restructuring programmes and other macroeconomic policies.

G. Women in power and decision-making

31. The expression "parity" is not used in the Platform for Action and should not be used in the system-wide medium-term plan.

32. Decision-making should be addressed at all levels.

33. Activities within the United Nations Secretariat in this area of concern need to be strengthened.

34. The United Nations Statistics Division should collect and publicize statistics (in a yearly publication) on the number of women and men throughout the United Nations system at all levels, including their regional and subregional composition by gender.

35. Research on representation of men in fields where they are underrepresented should be added.

36. Dialogue with and the participation of local communities and civil society needs to be strengthened in development activities.

H. Institutional mechanisms for the advancement of women

37. The United Nations system should take into account that the main task of national machineries for the advancement of women is to support government-wide mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all policy areas, and that Governments should create or strengthen national machineries and other governmental bodies for the advancement of women.

38. Providing support and technical assistance to Governments on how to strengthen institutional capacities for the advancement of women requires a broader range of actions to be considered than those reflected in the system-wide medium-term plan, which focus particularly on the collection, use and dissemination of data. Including gender capacity-building elements in national plans and development strategies, as well as in supportive efforts provided by international cooperation, should be considered.

I. Human rights of women

39. Emphasize that women's rights are human rights.

40. Emphasize further that the human rights of women and of the girl child are an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of all human rights and fundamental freedoms.

41. It should be stressed that this is one of the priority objectives of the United Nations.

42. The United Nations should develop a comprehensive policy programme for mainstreaming the human rights of women throughout the United Nations system emphasizing the strengthening of the cooperation and coordination between different entities of the United Nations in the promotion and protection of the human rights of women.

43. The Centre for Human Rights should take into account the International Conference on Population and Development Programme for Action 8/ and the Fourth World Conference on Women Platform for Action 9/ in all aspects of the human rights of women.

8/ Report of the International Conference on Population and Development, Cairo, 5-13 September 1994 (A/CONF.171/13).

9/ Report of the Fourth World Conference on Women, Beijing, 4-15 September 1995 (A/CONF.177/20).

44. Integration of human rights of women in all activities of the United Nations should be emphasized.

J. Women and the media

45. This section should be updated in the light of the Platform for Action and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development.

46. The activities of all parts of the United Nations Secretariat should be reflected, not just those of the Division for the Advancement of Women and the Department of Public Information. A gender element is needed in all programmes.

47. Emphasis should be placed on the ability to communicate in order to get the mainstreaming message across.

48. Public information and outreach should be undertaken by all parts of the United Nations system. Mainstreaming a gender perspective into all publications is essential. The role of women in political activity, as well as in the social and economic activity in the United Nations system is important. Not only should agencies that have traditionally had a role in this critical area of concern undertake activities, but also others should get more involved in the future.

K. Women and the environment

49. In the indication of areas of research, more emphasis should be given to the issues identified in paragraph 258 (b) of the Platform for Action.

50. The work on indicators should be integrated with the work initiated under the aegis of the Commission on Sustainable Development.

L. The girl child

51. Educating the girl child about rights guaranteed to her under international human rights should be given more importance.

52. Health should be emphasized, including reproductive and sexual health and information on human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome.

M. Institutional arrangements

53. More attention should be given to measures to promote mainstreaming of a gender perspective into all policies and programmes of the United Nations.

54. Clarification has to be sought on progress regarding innovative mobilization of resources.

55. Experiences from bilateral and regional cooperation should be taken into account by indicating best practices and the importance of policy dialogue and country strategies.

56. The role of the Economic and Social Council and the importance of coordinated follow-up of all major United Nations conferences should be further highlighted.